

Piloting a  
searchable  
database  
of dropout  
prevention  
programs in nine  
low-income urban  
school districts in  
the Northeast and  
Islands Region



Summary





# Piloting a searchable database of dropout prevention programs in nine low-income urban school districts in the Northeast and Islands Region

## Summary

**March 2008; Revised January 2009 to include a users guide for the database**

**Prepared by**

**Athi Myint-U**

**Education Development Center, Inc.**

**Lydia O'Donnell**

**Education Development Center, Inc.**

**David Osher**

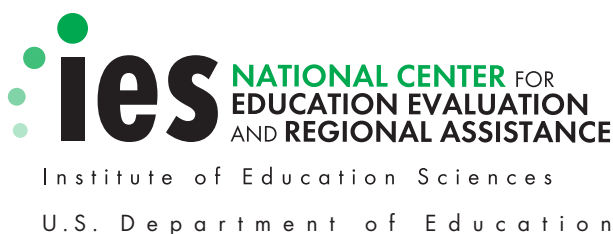
**American Institutes for Research**

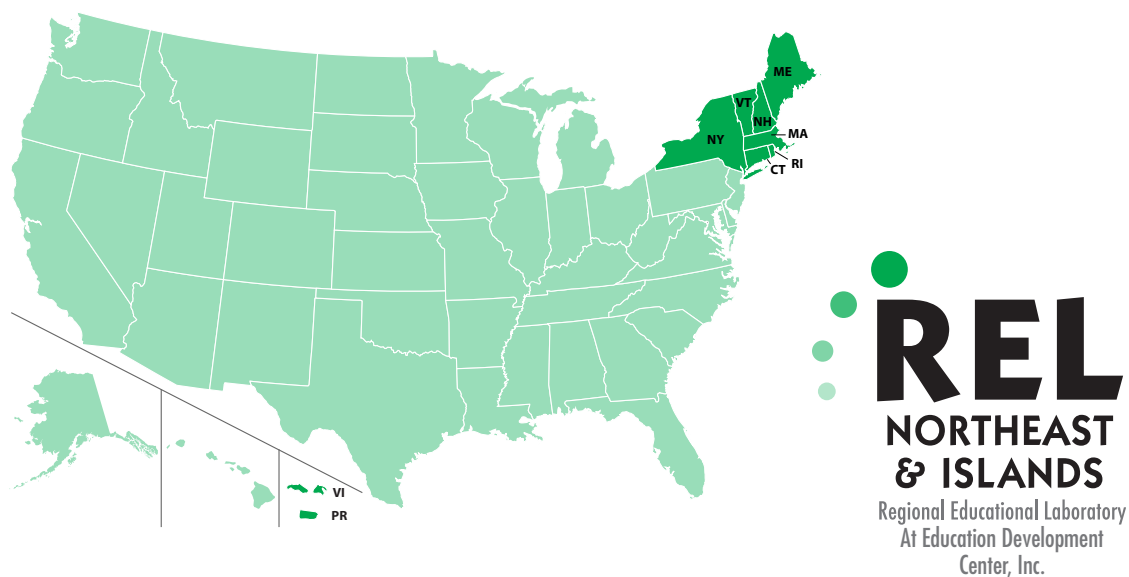
**Anthony Petrosino**

**WestEd**

**Ann Stueve**

**Education Development Center, Inc.**





**Issues & Answers** is an ongoing series of reports from short-term Fast Response Projects conducted by the regional educational laboratories on current education issues of importance at local, state, and regional levels. Fast Response Project topics change to reflect new issues, as identified through lab outreach and requests for assistance from policymakers and educators at state and local levels and from communities, businesses, parents, families, and youth. All Issues & Answers reports meet Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research.

March 2008; Revised January 2009 to include a users guide for the database

This report was prepared for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under Contract ED-06-CO-0025 by Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands administered by Education Development Center, Inc. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

This report is in the public domain. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, it should be cited as:

Myint-U, A., O'Donnell, L., Osher, D., Petrosino, A., & Stueve, A. (2008; revised January 2009). *Piloting a searchable database of dropout prevention programs in nine low-income urban school districts in the Northeast and Islands Region* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2008–No. 046). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>

This report is available on the regional educational laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

## Summary

# Piloting a searchable database of dropout prevention programs in nine low-income urban school districts in the Northeast and Islands Region

**Despite evidence that some dropout prevention programs have positive effects, whether districts in the region are using such evidence-based programs has not been documented. This report details a pilot project to generate and share knowledge by building a searchable database of dropout programs and policies.**

To generate and share knowledge on dropout programs and policies, this report details a project to create a searchable database with information on target audiences, prevention strategies, age ranges, in-school and out-of-school staff involvement, and whether programs were reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse. Based on the dropout prevention literature, the database identifies nine service goals (such as increase school attachment and decrease truancy) and 17 core strategies (such as community learning curricula and tutoring/extra classes) and maps these across schools, districts, and programs and policies.<sup>1</sup>

Despite evidence that some dropout prevention programs have positive effects, whether districts in the region are using such evidence-based programs has not been documented. The report records dropout prevention programs and policies in nine mid-size cities with the Northeast and Islands Region's highest dropout rates, largest minority student populations, and most children living below the poverty line. Because data collection was limited to nine pilot sites, the main purpose of the study is to demonstrate the types of questions that the database can

answer, especially as more districts are added and tracked over time.

Each of the nine districts is currently implementing at least nine dropout prevention programs and policies. All programs and policies in the database explicitly target dropout prevention, dropout reduction, or school completion or target subpopulations of students that the dropout prevention literature demonstrates to be at high risk of dropping out (for example, pregnant teens, students who are old for their grade, and students with emotional or behavioral challenges).

Testing the searchable database with data from the pilot districts focused on two sets of data. The first is the characteristics of programs and policies implemented across districts:

- The core strategies most frequently used are tutoring/extra classes (38 records), social and emotional learning curricula (37 records), and community collaboration (34 records).
- Each of the nine service goals is targeted by at least 14 programs or policies across the pilot districts. The goals most commonly targeted are to improve academic performance and to increase school attachment.
- Seven programs and policies target middle school youth only (grades 6–8), 51 target high school youth only (grades 9–12), 46 target both middle school and high school youth, and 20 are not grade specific.

- About 30 percent of the programs target students with academic needs, about 18 percent target students who are chronically absent or truant, and about 15 percent target students with behavioral challenges.

The second set of data concerns the characteristics of individual districts and sets of districts:

- Each pilot district uses 13 or more core strategies, with 11 core strategies of the 17 used by all nine districts.
- In six pilot districts the greatest number of programs and policies targets improving academic performance. The other three districts have more programs and policies targeting increasing school attachment and decreasing truancy and providing support during transitions.
- In four pilot districts the greatest number of programs and policies targets subsets of students designated as at-risk because they are members of particular segments of the school population, such as pregnant teens and English language learners. In two districts the greatest number of programs and policies targets individuals who have exhibited behaviors, such as failing grades, that put them at high risk of dropping out.

When information from more districts is available, the database will be able to provide data on other questions as well. The report includes sample shells for tables on those data.

The database also identifies whether a program or policy has been reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse. Two of the programs reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse are being implemented in the pilot districts, Talent Search (five districts) and Career Academies (eight). None of the districts is using the other 10 programs reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse, and none is using a What Works Clearinghouse-reviewed program that has mixed effects or no discernable effects.

Several programs and policies being implemented by multiple districts have not been reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse. Review of such programs and policies will be appropriate only if they meet eligibility criteria, which require substantial evaluation evidence. To date, such evidence is limited on most programs being used. Reflecting the lack of rigorous evaluation is that most informants could provide only anecdotal evidence of local success (not included in the database).

The report makes three recommendations for better documenting progress toward evidence-based practices for keeping students in school:

- Moving beyond nine sites in the pilot phase with an effort across regional educational laboratories to expand the database to include dropout prevention strategies in districts across the country.
- Developing and implementing a sampling plan to catalog dropout prevention programs and policies in Puerto Rico, where large proportions of students are at high risk of dropping out.
- Expanding the database in the initial pilot sites to monitor changes in dropout prevention programs and policies and adoption of evidence-based practices—and to include a greater diversity of districts within the region, especially larger cities where many students are at risk of dropping out.

**March 2008; Revised January 2009 to include a users guide for the database**

#### Note

1. Users can access the database online at <http://www.relnei.org/research.educational.dropoutdb.php>. An account name and password from REL Northeast and Islands are needed to log in to the database. To receive an account name and password, contact [dropoutprevention@edc.org](mailto:dropoutprevention@edc.org).